

Jamestown in Historical Fiction: Selected Titles



Seventeenth-century Virginia and the colony of Jamestown provide the setting for the following list of historical novels. The fate of the Native Americans, the inhabitants of Virginia for centuries before the arrival of the English settlers; the struggle of the English colony for survival; and relations between the two groups of people are some of the topics dramatized by these novels. In particular, the novels about John Smith and Pocahontas often depict a romantic relationship between the English explorer and the young Indian woman, while Samuel Argall and Opechancanough often play villainous parts in the narratives.

The following titles are in the collection of the Library of Virginia. To look for additional historical novels in our "Books, Journals" catalog, perform a "Browse an Alphabetical List" search, using subject headings such as "Jamestown Va. Fiction," "Pocahontas d. 1617 Fiction," and "Smith, John 1580–1631 Fiction."

Anonymous. *The Chief's Daughter*. London: J. H. and J. Parker, [1859?]. PZ3 C533 1859

The Chief's Daughter presents an early account of the John Smith-Pocahontas legend. However, the most prominent figure in this narrative is Reverend Robert Hunt, who accompanied the English settlers to Jamestown in 1607 and saw himself as a missionary to the New World and its inhabitants.

Barth, John. *The Sot-Weed Factor*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960. PZ4 B284 S7

Although the setting is colonial Maryland, the legend of John Smith and Pocahontas is a crucial—and irreverent—element in the plot. Sprawling and bawdy, John Barth's novel is in the tradition of Cervantes, Fielding, and Sterne.

Bernhard, Virginia. *A Durable Fire*. New York: Morrow, 1990. PS3552 E73145 D87 1990

The story focuses on historical figures Governor George Yardley [sic] and his wife, Temperance, but also includes the viewpoints of other significant people such as Opechancanough, Pocahontas, and John Smith. The novel depicts the grim and violent experiences of the English colonists, including the Starving Time, conflicts with Powhatan and his people, and discord among the colonists themselves.

Bowman, John Clarke. *Powhatan's Daughter*. New York: Viking Press, 1973. PZ3 B7874 P9

This novel depicts a love affair between John Smith and Pocahontas that begins in Virginia and continues when she visits England with her husband, John Rolfe. The story focuses on its romantic heroine, from her rescue of John Smith to her impressions and experiences at the Court of King James.

Cooke, John Esten. *My Lady Pokahontas*. N.p.: Houghton, Mifflin, 1879. Reprinted as part of the Americans in Fiction series, Ridgewood, N.J.: Gregg Press, 1968. PZ3 C772 M95 1968

By a notable Virginia author, this is the fictional memoir of historical figure Anas Todkill, English settler and loyal friend of John Smith. The title character is presented as a "guardian angel of the white and red people" of Virginia. William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson make appearances.

Davis, John. *The First Settlers of Virginia*. 2nd ed. New York: Printed for I. Riley and Co., 1806. PR4525 D56 F5 1806; 3rd ed. Wilmington, Del.: Printed for Simon Kollock, 1825. PR4525 D56 F5 1825

Englishman John Davis wrote the first fictional accounts dramatizing the relationship between John Smith and Pocahontas. Sentimental, even rapturous in its style, the story of the gallant John Smith and the adoring Pocahontas is the forerunner to subsequent depictions of their story as a romance.

Hunt, Angela Elwell. *Jamestown*. Vol. 3, Keepers of the Ring. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1996. PS3558 U46747 J36 1996

Three children separated in their escape from a massacre are reunited years later. The story takes place in London and Jamestown, as well as among the Powhatan Indians. This Christian-oriented historical novel, third volume in a series entitled Keepers of the Ring, portrays the lives of a family beginning with the Lost Colony at Roanoke.

Johnston, Mary. *To Have and To Hold*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1900. A facsimile of the 1900 edition. Reprint [Whitefish, Mont.]: Kessinger, 2005. PS2142 T6 2005

English settler Ralph Percy chooses a wife from among a shipload of brides sent to the colony by the Virginia Company. Later he finds out that she is supposed to marry a powerful aristocrat back in England. This romantic melodrama by a notable Virginia author includes appearances by John Rolfe, George Yeardley, and Opechancanough.

Mason, F. Van Wyck. *The Sea Venture*. Mattituck, N.Y.: Amereon Limited, 1961. PS3525 A7943 S42 1961

In 1609, the Third Supply of settlers leaves England for Jamestown. One of the ships, the Sea Venture, is separated from the others during a hurricane. While most of the story occurs in Bermuda, where the settlers were shipwrecked, there are scenes in Jamestown with appearances by John Smith, Powhatan, and Pocahontas. Historical and fictional characters alike are depicted in realistic terms and not romanticized.

Noël Hume, Ivor. *Civilized Men: A James Towne Tragedy*. Richmond, Va.: Dietz Press, 2006. PS3614 O397 C58 2006

Two brothers accompany Lord Delaware to Jamestown. During the conflict between the English settlers and the Native Americans, Will and John make choices concerning their loyalties that drastically alter their lives. The author, Ivor Noël Hume, is the former director of Colonial Williamsburg's Department of Archaeology.

Tormey, James H. *John Rolfe of Virginia*. Silver Spring, Md.: Beckham Publishing Group, 2006. PS3620 O76 J6 2006

This novel tells the story of Jamestown from the point of view of John Rolfe, English husband of Pocahontas. Depicted as a reserved gentleman, he is also the ambitious developer of the product that saves Jamestown, tobacco.

Vollman, William T. *Argall*. New York: Viking, 2001. PS3572 O395 A83 2001

Extraordinary and challenging, this historical novel presents Jamestown—as well as the relationship between John Smith and Pocahontas—as a tragedy. John Smith is a striver, endeavoring to escape his restricted place in English society, while Pocahontas is a sad figure, used by others to further their own schemes. The title character, Samuel Argall, is the chilling representative of imperialism.

Wohl, Burton. *Soldier in Paradise*. New York: Putnam, 1977. PZ4 W85 S68

In this fictional autobiography, John Smith looks back on his life. His swashbuckling yarn begins with a restless childhood in Lincolnshire and proceeds through fantastic adventures as a soldier of fortune on to his efforts in Virginia to establish an English colony. His character dominates a narrative in which even Pocahontas seems a secondary character.

Sarah Huggins
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Cover Illustration: "Smith Rescued by Pocahontas," by H. Schile, New York, 1874. Library of Virginia Prints and Photographs Collection, Lab. No. 98-1556-04.

